# A field guide to folding

## How to spot accordions, basics, exotics, gates, maps, parallels, posters and rolls

I have spent the past seven years of my life researching brochure folds. So when I say folding is my passion, I'm not kidding. You'll frequently find me out by my mailbox, gingerly separating the wafer seal or fugitive glue on a direct-mail brochure, in search of a new folding specimen for my collection. Once in a while I do find one, and it's glorious.

After doing a little victory dance, I classify the fold. Folding styles have distinct characteristics that allow them to be classified into folding "families." All brochure folds can be classified as Accordions, Basics, Exotics, Gates, Maps, Parallels, Posters or Rolls. Here'a handy guide you can share with your designer clients.
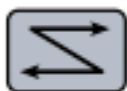
Accordions

The Accordion family is one of the largest folding families, with almost 50 varieties. Accordions are also some of the most common folding styles used in brochure folding. It's easy to spot one—just look for the zig-zag panels. They are an excellent choice for a variety of applications, but are notoriously problematic during auto-insertion into envelopes. This style of folding offers flexibility, with the potential to add as many panels as the limitations of press and folding equipment can bear.
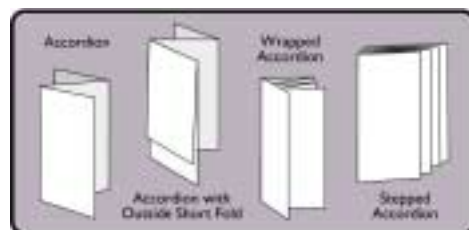

Accordion

Basics

The Basic folding family consists of some of the easiest and most common folding styles. Great for low budget or simple projects, these styles are perfect for invitations, newsletters and brochures, and virtually guarantee stress-free production at almost any printer or bindery. Simplicity is what distinguishes these folding styles from others.
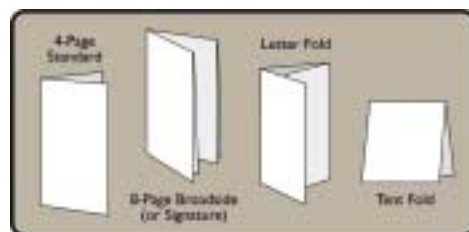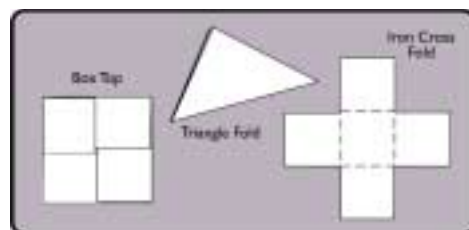

Basic

Exotics

The Exotic family is the most exciting. Filled with unrelated specialty folds that challenge even the most creative mind, many of these styles require a specialty bindery or hand-folding. They can be expensive, especially if they require manual labor.
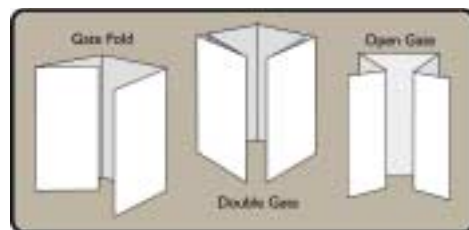

Exotic

Gates

Gate folds are generally symmetrical, with two or more panels folding into the center from opposing sides. Not surprisingly, gate folds are created using a gate-fold attachment on the folding machine. If your printer doesn't have gate-folding capabilities, the folding will be outsourced or done by hand.

Gate

Clip and save!

Maps

A cousin to the Accordion family, Map folds characteristically have several accordion folds and are built in a tall format that opens into a large continuous layout, rather than spreads. This tall layout generally requires that it is folded in half, third, or even quarters. Because of this, a map fold is described in "stories." A map folded in half is a two-story map (two stories high), the map folded in thirds is a three-story map, and in quarters is a four-story map. Maps are limited to lighter weight stocks and may require special machinery configurations.

Parallels

The Parallel folding family consists of styles with panels that stay parallel to each other. Parallel folds run the gamut from simple to complicated, and offer a variety of options suitable for almost any application.
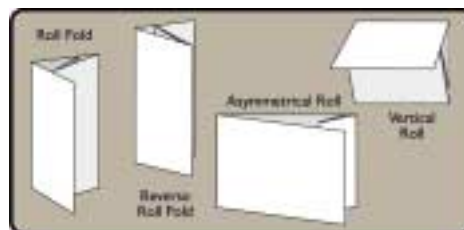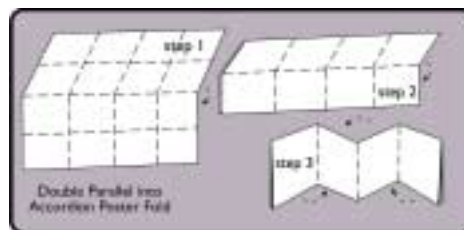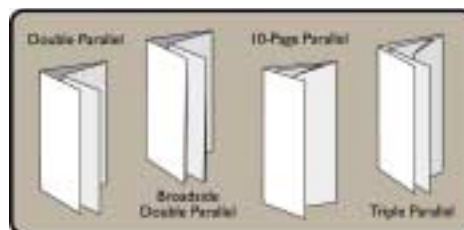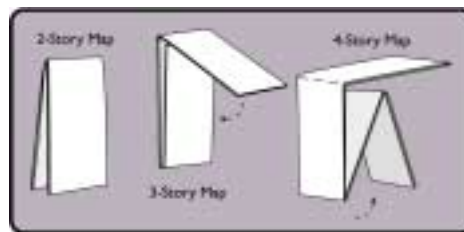
Posters

Poster folds are combination folds that are built to open out into a large poster format. Posters consist of at least two folds—with one serving as the base fold, and one as the finished fold. The base fold is the first folding style applied, the finished fold is the folding style it adapts for the finished format. Posters are limited to lighter weight stocks.

Rolls

Roll folds consist of four or more panels that roll in on each other. The roll-in panels must get incrementally smaller to be able to tuck into the respective panels. One of the benefits of a roll fold is that it can have multiple panels, but rolls into a compact package.

Map

Parallel

Posters

Roll

Classification means standardization

Why should you care about classifying folds? Consider the advantages of speaking a common postpress language. If you choose a common folding style, for example, a standard accordion fold, and show it to a print production professional, he or she might call it an accordion fold, a z-fold or a back-and-forth fold. Designers might call it something different, too, or they may make a sketch of the fold or send a makeshift paper dummy to avoid giving the fold a name. And that's just for a simple accordion!

But if graphic-arts professionals could establish a definitive identification of each folding style, all parties in involved in the print-production process would know exactly what was expected —whether it be a three-panel accordion, a reverse roll, a swinger fold, a triple parallel or any of almost 200 other brochure folds.

If the ultimate goal in manufacturing is predictability, consistency, and speed, then the formula for success is standardization. But if we as an industry cannot agree on even the simplest language—that an accordion fold is an accordion fold and not a z-fold or other—then the path to standardization in the bindery is a dead end.

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